

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W. H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

This lesson can take from one class period to one week. The poem: “Oh What is That Sound” by W.H. Auden can be taught independently focusing on the world perspective or in conjunction with the in-depth poetic analysis.

**I. Content:**

I want my students to be able to:

- A. Understand the conditions of the East German people following the division of Germany after WWII, particularly after the building of the Berlin Wall.
- B. Use reading strategies to determine main ideas and to collect data, facts, and ideas.
- C. Evaluate how an author uses language and literary devices to evoke a response in a reader: style, format, structure
- D. Know the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres
- E. Interpret the social, cultural, and historical significance of a text.
- F. Analyze author's purpose within a literary text: characterization, theme, point of view, organization and form
- G. Paraphrase a poem considering point of view and organizational style.
- H. Analyze a poem by considering the text and historical background, and then making inferences. (text to text, text to self, text to world)
- I. Choose tone, voice, style, mood, and persona appropriate for different purposes and audiences
- J. Evaluate the character traits exhibited in a poem, and reflect on those traits in themselves.

**II. Prerequisites:**

The students should have:

- A. A general understanding of the genre of poetry
  - i. Definitions or access to definitions of onomatopoeia, parallelism, imagery (**Student Handout #4**)
  - ii. A basic understanding of meter
  - iii. A basic understanding of rhyme scheme
- B. An understanding of point of view
- C. An understanding of First Amendment rights under the US Constitution.

**III. Instructional Objectives(s):**

The student will:

- A. Read poetry for enjoyment and life-long learning.
- B. Read and discuss non-fiction to expand knowledge of the human condition and experience.
- C. Identify and analyze literary elements of poetry.
- D. Demonstrate skill as an active, involved reader.

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W. H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

- E. Demonstrate understanding of and incorporate the elements of poetry: theme, speaker, figurative language, tone, and word choice
- F. Evaluate how an author uses language and literary devices to evoke a response in a reader: style, format, structure.
- G. Write poetry for self-expression.

**IV. Materials and Equipment:**

A. Teacher:

- i. Lesson Packet
- ii. “O What is That Sound” by W.H. Auden found in  
*Prentice Hall: Literature Platinum*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996. (**Teacher Handout #1**)
- iii. Web sites  
Time line for post-WWII Germany and the Berlin wall:  
[http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin\\_wall/timeline.html](http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin_wall/timeline.html) This site explains the Ministry of State Security (Stasi) observation and control of all East Germans during the GDR.  
<http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/> This site gives more background information on the poet W.H. Auden  
<http://www.cs.ucsb.edu/~chiran/auden.html>
- iv. Smartboard or overhead (optional)
- v. Notes for analyzing poetic devices in poem (**Teacher Handout #3**)

B. Student:

- i. Anticipatory Guide (**Student Handout #1**)
- ii. Internet access (optional)
- iii. “O What Is That Sound” by W.H. Auden (**Teacher Handout #1**)
- iv. Narrative poem graphic organizer (**Student Handout #2**)
- v. Graphic organizer for analyzing mood in poem (**Student Handout #3**)
- vi. Poetic Devices: Definitions (**Student Handout #4**)

**V. Instructional Procedure:**

A. Provide background knowledge

- i. Allow the students to assess their own understanding of Modern Germany and then develop a more thorough background knowledge using the “Anticipatory Reading Guide” worksheet (**Student Handout #1**) and the informational handout “Behind the Wall”. (**Teacher Handout #2**) The students should first answer the prompts with what they already know. They can then review the web sites or read the handout provided to scan for the needed information. Finally, students can collaborate with each other, and develop more complete answers. To culminate, the teacher should guide the class through a review of the questions, to check for understanding.

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W. H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

This method of checking previous knowledge, and then building on that knowledge by purposeful reading is a very effective technique. Not only do the students gather the information that they need, but they are also aware of their own learning.

B. Experience the poem.

- i. Read the poem “O What Is That Sound” by W.H. Auden aloud.

*Prentice Hall: Literature Platinum.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996. **(Teacher Handout #1)**

The poem can also be found on-line at

<http://www.poemhunter.com/p/m/poem.asp?poet=6570&poem=34306>

It’s important to read the poem to the class so that they can hear it read by a prepared reader.

- ii. Encourage the students to react to the poem. Try to allow them to develop opinions without correction. One approach is to use small reading circles with assigned roles including: reader, scribe, speaker. It’s often good to assign mixed-ability groups. After the discussions, the speaker can present their reactions to the class. Some possible discussion starter questions follow.
1. How does the poem make you feel? Why?
  2. What images does the author create?
  3. What do you suppose they mean?
  4. What poetic devices does the poet use?
  5. Why do you suppose he chose them?
  6. What do you think he meant by this poem?
- iii. Provide some background on the author W. H. Auden. According to the Prentice Hall text, Auden was an English poet who studied at Oxford University in England. He was recognized as a leading poet while he was still young. He married Erika Mann, daughter of novelist Thomas Mann, to get her the British passport she needed to escape Hitler’s Germany. It is highly likely that this poem refers to the danger and duplicity that existed in Germany *during* WWII, but it can also be easily applied to the fearful days in East Germany during Stasi control.
- iv. This poem is an example of dramatic narrative poetry. To reinforce the **narrative mode**, have the students fill in the graphic organizer **(Student Handout #2)** to retell the narrative. They will identify the plot elements, the characters/speakers, and the point of view. The rising actions will come from each stanza in the format of question and answer between the two speakers. The teacher could also put the organizer up on a Smartboard, overhead projector, or a white board, and complete it cooperatively with the class. (Having the students come up and add an element to the chart encourages student

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W. H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

engagement.) Another option would be to have students paraphrase the poem, being sure to identify the relevant plot elements. **Teacher note:** It’s important to point out that there are two speakers in this poem, and the dialogue develops the dichotomy between the two speakers.

- C. Analyze the poetic devices
  - i. Review the following terms with the class:
    - 1. rhythm - the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in language.
    - 2. rhyme - the repeated ending sounds in words
    - 3. meter - the repetition of a regular rhythmic unit in a line of poetry, the systematic way in which accented and unaccented syllables are arranged.
    - 4. metrical foot - consists of one accented syllable and one or more unaccented ones
    - 5. masculine rhyme - when the last word in a line rhymes with the last word in another line (typical pattern)
    - 6. feminine rhyme - when the last accented syllable rhymes and is followed by an identical unaccented syllable (as in this poem)
    - 7. stanza - a group of lines that form a unit of poetry
  - ii. Apply the above terms to the poem. It would probably be easiest to identify each device within the poem on a Smartboard or overhead. Use the teacher’s guide (**Teacher Handout #3**)
  - iii. Have the students analyze the mood of the poem based on the words, patterns and images found in the poem. A graphic organizer is included in the appendix.
- D. Have the students reflect on the poem in relation to your school’s character traits. One method of group discussion is to have the students toss a “speaker's ball” or some object that allows only the holder to share his/her opinion. Everyone else must be quiet and listen. Some discussion starters follow:
  - i. Did the second speaker in the poem exhibit positive character traits? Explain.
  - ii. Why did the second speaker leave?
  - iii. Was he responsible for the soldiers coming?

**VI. Assessment and Evaluation:**

- A. Formative assessment
  - i. Graphic Organizer for Narrative Poem (**Student Handout #2**)
  - ii. Mood Graphic Organizer (**Student Handout #3**)
- B. Summative assessment
  - i. Have the students write one final stanza for the poem as an epilogue. The stanza should follow the pattern of all the others in the poem in

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W.  
H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

meter and rhyme scheme. The poem’s speakers should reflect on the inferred resolution of the narrative poem-after time has past.

Example:

O why did you leave me to face such a fate?

Was the treasure you earned so precious, so precious?

I sold out my soul to the barterers of hate.

And the cost, atrocious.

**VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:**

Standard 1: Reading Process

**Goal 1.2: Acquire Concepts About Text**

9.LA.1.2.2 Identify the text characteristics of different genres of literature.

Standard 2: Comprehension /Interpretation

**Goal 2.1: Acquire Strategies and Skill for Comprehending Text**

9.LA.2.1.2 Apply reading strategies to self monitor for comprehension.

9.LA.2.1.3 Clarify an understanding of text by creating outlines, notes, annotations, charts, and/or diagrams

**Goal 2.3: Acquire Skills for Comprehending Literary Text**

9.LA.2.3.3 Evaluate the importance of the setting to the mood and meaning of the text.

Standard 3: Writing Process

**Goal 3.1: Acquire Prewriting Skills**

9.LA.3.1.4 Match format to purpose and audience

9.LA.3.1.5 Produce a piece of writing within a set period of time

Standard 4: Writing Applications

**Goal 4.4: Acquire Skills for Literary Response**

9.LA.4.4.2 Write responses to literature that demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of an author’s style.

**VIII: Follow Up or Extension Activities:**

- A. Write a literary essay on the mood of the poem, using the graphic organizer (**Student Handout #3**) as a pre-write activity.
- B. Conduct a mock trial of the second speaker in the poem.
- C. Perform the poem as a choral reading.
- D. Invite a German citizen, (possibly a foreign exchange student, visitor, or member of Idaho’s International Education Task Force) to come in to the class and present on Modern Germany as a pre-reading activity. Research some personal accounts of Germans that lived through the building of the Berlin Wall, and the fall of the wall. Possible resources include: <http://www.rjgeib.com/biography/europe/germany/berlin.html> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin> wall

*International Education: : O What Is That Sound” by W.  
H. Auden and Post WWII East Germany*

- E. Research the student letter that is highlighted on the “Runde Ecke” of Leipzig website. Exercise our First Amendment rights by writing a letter to a US government official protesting some aspect of our government.  
<http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/>
- F. Complete a related activity on the art of the Berlin Wall
  - i. View some of the murals painted on the West Berlin Wall
  - ii. Use a personal experience-based model to respond to the art.
  - iii. Examine the symbols and style used on the wall.
  - iv. Design and paint a mural for the Berlin Wall on the Eastern side. (not painted before reunification due to security forces) Possible web sites include:  
<http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/photographs/> and  
<http://www.papaink.org/gallery/home/artist/display/96.html>

## Teacher Handout 1

### O What Is That Sound

W. H. Auden

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear  
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?  
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,  
The soldiers coming.

O what is that light I see flashing so clear  
Over the distance brightly, brightly?  
Only the sun on their weapons, dear,  
As they step lightly.

O what are they doing with all that gear,  
What are they doing this morning, morning?  
Only their usual manoeuvres, dear,  
Or perhaps a warning.

O why have they left the road down there,  
Why are they suddenly wheeling, wheeling?  
Perhaps a change in their orders, dear,  
Why are you kneeling?

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care,  
Haven't they reined their horses, horses?  
Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,  
None of these forces.

O is it the parson they want, with white hair,  
Is it the parson, is it, is it?  
No, they are passing his gateway, dear,  
Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer that lives so near.  
It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?  
They have passed the farmyard already, dear,  
And now they are running.

O where are you going? Stay with me here!  
Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?  
No, I promised to love you, dear,  
But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,  
O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;  
Their boots are heavy on the floor  
And their eyes are burning.

*Prentice Hall: Literature Platinum.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.

<http://www.poemhunter.com/p/m/poem.asp?poet=6570&poem=34306>

## Teacher Handout 2

### Behind the Wall: Life in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or Communist East Germany)

The following information comes from websites that are easily accessible by teachers and students. A summary is available if time or resources do not allow accessing the original sites. This site provides a timeline of the Berlin Wall.

[http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin\\_wall/timeline.htm](http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin_wall/timeline.htm)

This site explains the Ministry of State Security (Stasi) observation and control of East Germans during the GDR, particularly in Leipzig, Germany.

<http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/>

**1945** World War II ends in Europe when Germany surrenders.

The Potsdam Conference divides Germany and Berlin into four occupation zones: British, French, American, and Soviet.

**1948** Separate governments are created for East and West Berlin.

**1949** The United States, Canada and Western European countries form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) –; an alliance committed to defending each other.

The United States, Britain and France create the Federal Republic of Germany, a democratic West Germany.

The Soviet Union creates the German Democratic Republic, a communist East Germany.

**1950 - 1960** The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union continues. West Berlin starts to prosper. East Berlin doesn't. More than 3 million East Germans flee to the West.

**1961** President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita Khrushchev hold a summit in Vienna. It's unsuccessful. Khrushchev threatens nuclear war.

Berliners hear rumors of the Soviet Union closing the border. On Aug. 11, 1961, more than 4,000 East Germans flee to West Berlin. On Aug. 13, East German troops close the border between East and West Berlin with barbed wire. Two days later they place concrete slabs at the border, signaling their intention to build a permanent wall.

At the end of October, American and Soviet tanks confront each other at Checkpoint Charlie, along the border between the American sector and East Berlin. The confrontation ends in a stalemate.

After the final stages of construction, the Berlin Wall is 96 miles long. It is 12 feet high with a concrete tube at the top.

**1970s-1980s** East and West Germans live with the Berlin Wall. There are thousands of escape attempts. Berliners find ingenious ways to communicate with friends and family across the wall.

**1985** Mikhail Gorbachev takes power in the Soviet Union. He begins democratic reform. The Cold War begins to thaw.

East Germans demonstrate against communism.

**1989** The Hungarian government opens its border with Austria in May. Many East Germans use that route to escape to the West.



## Teacher Handout 2

On Nov. 9, the Berlin Wall is opened. Travel restrictions are lifted. More than 10,000 East Germans cross the border to West Berlin. Mass celebrations last for days. People break pieces – even chunks – off the wall.

### Stasi Surveillance

After the war, West Germany bloomed economically, largely from financing from the NATO members. East Germany (GDR), however, did not, and citizens were flooding across the borders. Finally the borders were closed and the Berlin Wall was erected. The GDR developed a system of surveillance as a means of preserving their control. The **Ministry of State Security (Stasi)** was developed following the model of Soviet Russia's secret police organization (Cheka). One vivid example is found at the museum at the "Runde Ecke" in Leipzig, Germany. Distributing pamphlets or expressing opinions that were not those of the state was completely forbidden, and considered a capital crime. GDR citizens had no First Amendment rights. Every move was monitored, and records were kept on all individuals. Secret informers were working throughout the community for financial, or political reasons, or because of official coercion. Citizens never knew who was watching and reporting on individual's conversations and actions. Any activity deemed a threat to the government could be met with arrest, detention, loss of livelihood, and even torture and death. The following are some facts that illustrate what life was like for the citizens of East Germany.

- About 2,400 full-time Stasi officials went to work every day in the Leipzig district.
- The division into departments reflected the structure of society at large, as the Stasi felt responsible for all walks of life.
- The local branches ensured that the whole population was kept under surveillance.
- In addition to full-time personnel, in 1989 there were some 10,000 informers or "Unofficial Personnel" (often referred to by the German abbreviation 'IM') in the Leipzig district.
- The IM were recruited by means of elaborate procedures, they were obliged to maintain absolute secrecy concerning their contact with the Stasi. Each IM attended meetings with his or her case officer in 'conspiratorial flats', where they were given assignments and reported on their activities.
- The Ministry of State Security served the SED, the ruling communist party. The Stasi was the SED's "sword and shield", and the Stasi is known to have perverted justice on the direct orders of the party.
- The Stasi opened letters and then resealed them for delivery. Any money from the West was confiscated. Any "questionable" messages were copied and filed.
- Stasi members used disguises to spy on citizens, taking pictures and recording activities and conversations that might possibly indicate "conspiratorial" activities.
- Telephone cables were regularly tapped to record any conversations.
- Handwriting, saliva, and scent samples were collected and kept in files on common citizens in case they committed any "crimes against the state."

### Teacher Handout 3

## O What Is That Sound

W. H. Auden

♦ ❖ ♦ ♦ ❖ ♦ ♦ ❖ ♦ ❖  
O what is that sound which so thrills the ear  
❖ ♦ ♦ ❖ ❖ ♦ ❖ ♦  
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?  
❖ ♦ ❖ ♦ ❖ ♦ ❖  
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,  
♦ ❖ ♦ ❖ ♦  
The soldiers coming.

Key: ❖ = stressed syllable  
♦ = unstressed syllable

Stanza-unit  
of poetry

O what is that light I see flashing so **clear**  
Over the distance brightly, brightly?  
Only the sun on their weapons, **dear**,  
As they step lightly.

Masculine  
rhyme

O what are they doing with all that gear,  
What are they doing this morning, morning?  
Only their usual manoeuvres, dear,  
Or perhaps a warning.

Stanza-unit  
of poetry

O why have they left the road down there,  
Why are they suddenly wheeling, **wheeling**?  
Perhaps a change in their orders, dear,  
Why are you **kneeling**?

Feminine rhyme

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care,  
Haven't they reined their horses, horses?  
Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,  
None of these forces.

Each highlighted unit  
denotes a metrical foot

O is it the parson they want, with white hair,  
Is it the parson, is it, is it?  
No, they are passing his gateway, dear,  
Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer that lives so near.  
It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?  
They have passed the farmyard already, dear,  
And now they are running.

O where are you going? Stay with me here!  
Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?  
No, I promised to love you, dear,  
But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,  
O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;  
Their boots are heavy on the floor  
And their eyes are burning.

## Student Handout 1

Name \_\_\_\_\_

English 1, Grade Level: 9

Block 4/Poetic Devices Provide Historical Perspective

### **Behind the Wall: Anticipatory Reading Guide**

The following questions are designed to get you thinking about the history of Modern Germany, and it's development since WWII. (a) First read through the questions and answer them as best you can. (b) Next review the following web sites or read the handout "Behind the Wall" ([file:///http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/](http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/) [http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin\\_wall/timeline.htm](http://www.newseum.org/cybernewseum/exhibits/berlin_wall/timeline.htm)) Then add any new information you have found. (c) Finally pair up with one or two other students and share information to fill in any gaps.

1. What happened to the country of Germany after World War II?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. When and why was the Berlin Wall built?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. What was the "Stasi"? What did they do?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
4. Why were the citizens of the GDR afraid to speak or write their own opinions, even in private?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

## **Student Handout 1**

5. What might happen if a citizen was accused of working against the government in the GDR?
- a.
  - b.
  - c.

## Student Handout 2

Name \_\_\_\_\_

English 1, Grade Level: 9

Block 4/Poetic Devices Provide Historical Perspective

Graphic Organizer for Narrative Poem, "O What Is That Sound"

Question	Answer	Line from poem
Number of characters speaking		
Point of view		
Relationship of speakers		
Conflict		

Question:

Answer:

Question :

Answer:

Question :

Answer:

Question :

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Question :

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Question :

Answer:

Falling Action:

Resolution:

Exposition

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Mood: \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Handout 3

Name \_\_\_\_\_

English 1, Grade Level: 9

Block 4/Poetic Devices Provide Historical Perspective

#### Graphic Organizer for Mood in a Poem

Poets create a mood in a poem by intentionally choosing words, patterns, and images. Look at each stanza in the poem and identify the mood or emotion that is created. Then

Stanza	Emotion	Image, pattern, or word choice	Line of poem
1	Anticipation	“thrills”, drumming, drumming”	1, 2
2			
3			
4	Confusion, Danger	“wheeling, wheeling”, kneeling image	14, 16
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

analyze the stanza to determine what words, patterns of words, or images the poet used to create that mood. Finally identify the line of the poem in which you found your “evidence”. The first and fourth stanzas are done for you.

## **Student Handout 4**

### **Poetic Devices: Definitions**

Onomatopoeia: Literally means “name-making.” It is the process of creating or using words that imitate sounds. (Example: oink, moo, knock)

Parallelism: The repetition of words or phrases that have similar grammatical structures.

Imagery: Describes words or phrases that create vivid sensory experiences for the reader.